

librarian declared.

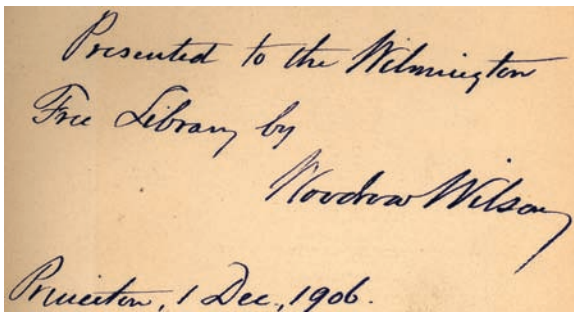
The *Wilmington Morning Star* raved that “The watching of this glorious story unfold on the screen makes one forget the...scientific marvels of our highly civilized twentieth century.”

#### *Presidential Ties*

In 1924, the death of Woodrow Wilson led to a high demand for books about him.

President Wilson lived in Wilmington when his father was minister of First Presbyterian Church. Wilson was an early supporter of a free public library.

In 1906, Wilson donated a signed copy of his biography of George Washington to the Wilmington Public Library. The book is preserved in the library’s rare book collection.



Presented to the Wilmington Free Library by Woodrow Wilson

#### *Growing Pains*

In 1925, New Hanover County budgeted \$500 toward the operation of the Wilmington Public Library, and a county representative was added to the library Board of Trustees.

Overdue book fines rose to between \$50 and \$75 per month, and the head librarian received a monthly salary of \$35.

Climbing to the 2nd floor of City Hall was burdensome for many citizens who lobbied for an elevator. When the city fathers refused to fund the elevator, the library Board promoted a plan to convert the Academy of Music (Thalian Hall) into a library.

Ultimately, it was decided that the cost of renovating the space would be as much or more than funding a new library building.

#### *Time for Change*

In October of 1926, a group representing the city’s African-American citizens met with the Library Board of Trustees and asked that they be allowed to use the library. The board instructed the librarian to inquire how other libraries in the state served the black community.

In February 1926, D.C. Virgo, principal of Williston Industrial School and representing the Negro Chamber of Commerce, made application to the City Council to have Wilmington Public Library privileges extended to the African-American



David Clarke Virgo

Sources available in the Local History Room of Main Library

community. The council denied the request, stating that the (white) public library was founded by the North Carolina Sorosis who raised the funds to begin the library. It was suggested that the black community do the same.

The Rev. G. D. Carnes of St. Stephen’s Church led a committee to raise \$2,500 to start a library. On May 17, 1926, the fund drive was concluded.

About 2,000 library supporters marched through the northern part of the city where they gathered at the African-American baseball park to hear the Rev. Carnes outline the future library plans. The Wilmington Colored Library formally opened on June 24, 1926, on the second floor of the Giblem Masonic Hall located on the southeast corner of Eighth and Princess Streets.

Fannie Blount, a teacher at Williston School, was initially in charge of the library. It took a determined populace less than four months to get their library.

#### *Birthday Celebration*

To celebrate the 20th birthday of the Wilmington Public Library, the Board of Trustees initiated a campaign to raise \$2,000 to purchase new books.

A newspaper editorial lamented, “Wilmington’s library has hardly kept pace with the growing demands made upon it by an ever-awakening public...if room to grow is denied, the reactions will be manifested in the community for years to come.”

#### *Feast of Pirates*

In the month of August 1927-29, the city held a festival called the Feast of Pirates. For several days the merriment embraced locals as well as visitors from around the state.



During the atmosphere of good times, the library board decided to begin fundraising for a new public library.

#### *1928—A Year of Firsts*

- A Citizens Library Association (the first Friends of the Library) was formed. Rabbi Ripkin of the Temple of Israel was elected chairman of the association.
- The library opened its first branch at the office of Mrs. C.C. Hanby, postmistress on Wrightsville Sound.
- The library’s first Children’s Room was dedicated.

#### *What Could Go Wrong?*

In May of 1929, The Wilmington Public Library’s annual report was impressive. Checkouts had climbed from 2,426 books in 1920 to 92,270—an average increase of 10,000 items per year.

The newspaper, educators, social clubs and civic groups praised the library. There was great hope for the construction of a new facility.

Hopes fell with the crash of the stock market on October 29, 1929.